

EXHIBIT D

The Honorable Judge Robert J. Jonker
United States District Court
Western District of Michigan
685 Federal Bldg.
110 Michigan St NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Re: USA v. Boden et al Case # 1:21-cr-0040-RJJ-1

February 5th, 2021

My name is Kathryn Christopher, I am a professor in the school of engineering at Grand Valley State University. I was a board member at the lab (The Geek Group), am a Westside community member, and remain a huge proponent of local educational programs. I have been a friend and supporter of Lis for the past 5 years.

As a member of the Board of Directors at The Geek Group National Science Institute (herein referred to as TGG), I worked alongside Lis nearly daily. Together, with the other staff, we fought for resources, wrote grants, and did the daily work that encompassed everything from painting walls, to running cables, to teaching members about software, science, and technology. I was inspired by her dedication to the organization, to the staff she worked with, and to the community who she constantly strived to help.

TGG provided a resource unlike any other to one of Grand Rapid's poorest communities. The lab was a special place that took in anyone with a sincere desire to learn, explore, or grow. It was like a family of misfits who could not find their place in other parts of society because they often lacked social skills or cared more for robots than football. Aside from its inclusivity, the lab provided equipment, knowledge, tools, and technology that most in Grand Rapids could only dream of. The lab was a shelter during storms, a haven during power outages, and a welcoming place to all who entered its doors. The instant access to training, job skills, computers, and equipment was (and is) unmatched, and the community around the lab was unendingly thankful to have this resource in their backyard.

In 2017, I was going through a tough divorce. Lis would often message me comforting and encouraging things. She even offered me a place to stay if I needed to leave where I was for my safety. She made it clear that she and the entire group at the lab were there for me, would support me, and would have my back. In such a tumultuous time in my life, I cannot express the comfort and stability she and the lab provided to me during that time. I spent many hours at the lab during this rough patch and got to know most of the employees, including Lis, pretty well.

One thing I learned quickly was that as the executive director of an all-volunteer organization operating in a 43,000 square foot building, Lis had the unenviable task of trying to hold it all together. She managed most of the staff, organized the finances, paid the bills, and oversaw most of the general operations. While Chris did a lot on the front end – marketing, public speaking, and big projects – Lis took care of the details. None of this was easy; in the autumn of 2018 alone, there were over a dozen shut-off notices and for a large part of the winter of 2017 and 2018, the building was

without gas and heat. Most months, she had to determine which 2 of the 5 bills they could afford that month, how to avoid the next shut-off, and try to keep an all-volunteer staff happy, warm, and fed. After spending a few months around the lab it was clear that the lab was struggling financially, and while this was largely kept out of the public knowledge, it was well known to those of us working behind the scenes. In short, the lab was financially desperate. Ironically, this was all while receiving voluminous amounts of verbal support and accolades, unfortunately, no matter how much good you are doing, only money pays the bills.

By 2018, TGG had many partnerships in the community and was beginning to see financial contributions from local foundations. It felt like the lab was on the brink of success, but it was not to be so. On December 21st, 2018, federal agents raided the building, and despite their claims of, “we’re not here to shut you down,” that was exactly what they did in effect. Many of the core staff from the lab think back now and wonder how a government that claims to protect and serve the public could so enthusiastically steal a resource from a downtrodden neighborhood where people *needed* it.

Unsurprisingly to me and those that know her, after the raid Lis grew the small business she was running in her extra time into a flourishing online store that runs out of the house she lives in. A few of the core staff still help her out when she gets inundated with orders and it is somewhat reminiscent of how the lab used to work. What is more unknown to outsiders, is that she recovered from the downfall of the lab and built this successful company all while battling a myriad of health issues. Lis usually has several doctors’ appointments a week for various issues, and the success she’s had despite that is truly amazing.

While I am aware that Lis and the other defendants in the case have pleaded guilty, I do not believe any of their actions were malicious or nefarious. I believe that context, character, and intent matter for true justice to occur. Lis’ character is one of grit, growth, and perseverance as she has shown countless times in my presence. Context and intent are nuanced, but I believe that desperate occasions sometimes make people act in ways they would not act ordinarily. I also believe that these charges of structuring reflect one of these times in Lis’ life. The lab was desperate, she had sacrificed so much to make it work, and she didn’t want to keep working in the constant stress of back-payments, shutoff notices, and lack of heat.

The task of sentencing remains with you, Your Honor, but I ask that you take into consideration Lis’ intent, context, and character before you decide. She remains a kind, generous, and dependable person despite the stress of the last three years, please do not take that away from her community.

Regards,

Kathryn Christopher

(former) Vice President of the Board of Directors
The National Science Institute

2549 Sandy Ridge Dr. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49534
E: kchristopher00@gmail.com
P: 616-477-2083